

DePaul University Loop Campus

Winter Quarter Thursday 6-9PM

Instructor:

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SW 224 An Environmental Sociology Materialism, Ideology and Pragmatism:

Course Description:

This course opens the discussion of the relationships and conflicts of society's perception of the built and natural landscape. It crosses the intersection of technology and industry and their resulting social problems. The study of society includes the phenomena of equity and inequality that beset humans and the living and non-living components that we experience daily. The act of consumption and the economy of technology, over time, impact human populations, mold our social experiences, and inform the actions that determine the physical environment in which we live. Ideologies, cultural, moral and ethical values present risk and knowledge that hone the attitudes and actions within our human communities. Humans, often being pragmatic, ultimately learn to mediate conflicts (environmental, social, cultural, economic and political) in order to perpetuate the institutions and social dynamics of our civilization.

Book(s)

Bell, Michael Mayerfeld. 2004. *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*. 2nd Ed. Pine Forge Press and
Buckingham, Susan and Mike Turner, 2008. *Understanding Environmental Issues*. Sage Publications Ltd

Competences

S-3-E Can describe how scientific or technological knowledge affects perspectives on the relationships between humans and nature

S-1-B Can use public or private institutions as resources for learning science.

S-3-C Can understand the scientific and social dimensions of an environmental issue.

H-1-E Can explain the concept, function, and expression of culture and illustrate the explanation with one or more cultures.

Course Schedule

Week One

An Introduction; environmental problems and society.
Sustainability and environmental justice
The history of environmental concern
Roman, Greek and Chinese ideologies of environmentalism
Contemporary environmentalism and the social elites
Democracy and environmentalism

Week Two

Human consumption, basic needs and affluence
A leisure class
Goods and advertising
Consumption and the human footprint, our built environment
Economics and Industrialization
The escalating cycle of production and consumption and the impact on the landscape
Technology and social structure
Convenience and phenomenology
Culture v politics

Week Three

Population growth and food distribution paradigms
Malthusian arguments
Global development and under-development
The perspective of inequality
Science, technology and a continued population growth or the anti-Malthusian effect
The role of women in social and urban development

Week Four

Group Presentations on the impact of consumption and the physical form of cities

Week Five

Health and environmental injustice
Environmental racism

Corporate power and justice movements, where and why
Gender and environmental domination
The ecology of patriarchy and urban development
Gender differences and the ideal of nature
Eco-feminism and politics
Risk assessment
Cultural factors, rational risk and choice: jobs v health
The sociology of disaster and accidents
Risk and democracy

Week Six

Christianity and environmental domination
The parallels of Protestantism and capitalism
Christianity, science and technology
Green Christianity (Creationists for Care)
Non-western philosophies and the environment
Individualism and environmental domination
The self and the community- a balancing act

Week Seven

The contradictions of nature/natural
Nature as a social construct, a historical perspective
Nature, biology, scientific racism
The wilderness ideal and ecotourism
Environmentalism and social exclusion

Week Eight

The organization of an ecological society
Loss of the commons and origins of the private
Collective action and solidarity movements
The 'local' movement and community reorganization
New urbanism and smart growth
After thoughts...

Weeks Nine and Ten

Individual student final presentations
Topic of choice

Demonstration of Competence
Written work (student required assignments)

Environmental marketing .

Review print, TV, radio and internet ads. Make a value judgment as to their efficacy, believability or ability to change one's actions or attitudes vis-à-vis the landscape/environment.

The American perspective of work.

Note the difference in perception of what classifies work, physical versus intellectual. What are the cultural impacts of this universal or regional attitude?. How does this foster racism, social hierarchy, segregation and urban tension?

Religion/philosophy and the environment.

Which belief system best informs community development in Western society? What connection is there to American communities and global communities in positive/negative ways? What role does localism play in this discussion?

Democracy, socialism, totalitarianism and theocracy.

Which of these political models best serves environmental justice ideals? What role does capitalism play in protecting/degrading of our communities? How does the ideal of the commons relate to smart growth, free trade and global solidarity movements?

Oral presentation

Group project.

Choose a city, American or foreign. Look at its global standing and review how consumption and or production of goods and services has impacted the social, political and environmental arrangement of its people and physical landscape.

What is its current environmental status?

Final presentation

Topic of student's choice. An in-depth research presentation relating to any facet discussed or ancillary to the class.

Grading:

Each student will receive a letter grade, unless pass/fail is requested. You cannot switch from one to another depending on the outcome of the course. Pass/fail must be elected at the beginning of the term.

Unexcused absences or late work will result in a lower letter grade.

Skills:

- To **reach** your goals in fulfilling your chosen competencies.
- To become **aware** of your environment, its impact on you and your impact on the environment, both locally and on a global scale.
- To be able to **articulate** and understand natural processes, cycles and concepts.
- To discuss **rationally**, based on factual material, controversial environmental issues.
- To make the best **choices** with your consumer dollars, votes and habits with regard to your environment, as an informed global citizen.

Learning Experience:

Readings in the text, newspapers, or journals, perusing the internet, listening to the radio and the news, class lectures, group discussions and role playing will facilitate the learning process. Incorporating personal experience and observations with new information will set the stage for a variety of perspectives and dimensions on these myriad issues. In depth exploration of a specific point of focus individually, in a team, research and oral presentation will fulfill a student's chosen competencies.

Attendance:

Attendance is usually indicative of the student's earnestness and interest in the topic. Given the short intensive period to complete the competencies, it is imperative that everyone be in class ready to participate. If there is a problem, please notify the instructor and fellow classmates if necessary so the class is not delayed.